

40 Days of Purpose – Sermon 1
What on Earth Am I Here For?
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The opening of the “Star Trek” television series used to proclaim that the crew of the S.S. Enterprise was on a journey to “boldly go where no man has gone before.” We are starting on a journey this morning as well, but instead of going where no one has gone before, we’re going where millions of people have gone before, following the footsteps of Christ through the season of Lent, through Palm Sunday, through the events of Holy Week, through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Our journey will take us to the Upper Room, the foot of the cross and, ultimately, to the

empty tomb. Today, we begin our bold journey through Lent.

The season of Lent is the 40 days before Easter, not including Sundays.

Throughout history it was tradition to baptize on Easter morning, so Lent became a time of study and preparation for those seeking baptism.

We also enter into Lent seeking something: God’s purpose for us. We are embarking on our “40 Days of Purpose,” and encouraging folks to read through and discuss “The Purpose Driven Life” by Rick Warren as we go. Our hope and prayer is that God will use these 40

days to prepare our minds and our hearts to discover God's purpose for our lives.

There's good biblical precedent for God using 40 days as a time of renewal and transformation. Noah's life was transformed by 40 days and 40 nights of rain. Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai before bringing God's law to the Israelites. Jesus was strengthened for his ministry after 40 days in the wilderness. And the disciples were transformed by their 40 days with Christ after the resurrection. The Bible tells us that when God wanted to prepare someone for something big, he took 40 days.

So we come to God this morning asking for something big: the answer to the question, "What on earth am I here for?" This fundamental question carries with it a significant implication: That we were put here on earth *for something*. We have a purpose. There are some folks who believe that we are only here to be born, live life, and die, that there's no greater purpose to our existence than simply to exist. And that's usually all that those folks end up doing. They join author Ashley Brilliant, who said, "My life has a superb cast, I just can't figure out the plot." Warren says these people live lives of aimless distraction, that their lives are motion

without meaning. But for many of us, we have this innate sense that we are here for some reason, and we look in many different places to try and find that reason.

Some people look around them for their purpose, hoping that they will find their purpose in their jobs or their relationships or their possessions. They look outside themselves for someone to tell them their purpose, for someone to confirm for them why they are here. Warren says that these people keep changing the externals – jobs, relationships, locations – hoping that each change will settle the confusion or fill the emptiness in their hearts.

Other people look within themselves to find their purpose, as if written somewhere in our DNA is our reason for being. These people say that you've got to create your own purpose in life. You have to discover your dreams, go after your goals, aim high. Now, that's all good advice, and if you follow it, you will probably be successful in life. But that doesn't mean you've answered the question. You could reach all your personal goals, achieve great success, and still miss your purpose in life.

The answer to the question "What on earth am I here for?" cannot be found around us and it cannot be found within us. It can only be

found beyond us, by looking beyond who we are and where we are to see whose we are. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God.

A year or so ago Sydney was in an invention phase. She loved putting together what she called “contraptions.” She would take whatever was lying around the house and, using vast amounts of string and tape, fashion a new contraption. One time she proudly presented me with one of these. It was a fork that was taped to a straw that was taped to a stick. I graciously received it and then asked very gently, “Honey, this is amazing! What’s it for?”

Turns out it was a back-scratcher.

The only person who knew what it was for was the person who created it. If we want to know the purpose of a creation, we have to ask the Creator. We were created by God, and only God knows the purpose for which we were created. You didn’t create yourself, so there’s no way you can tell yourself what you were created for. That’s why we cannot look around us or within us for our purpose. The answer isn’t there.

God created you for a purpose. In 1988, Life Magazine ran a cover story called “Why Are We Here?” in which they asked dozens of famous people their answer to

that question. One person said this, “I believe we’re here for a reason, created by somebody to live for somebody to return to somebody. I believe that I am created by God to do the job He’s given me while I’m here, to serve Him and then to return to Him.” You know which wizened philosopher who said that? Mike Ditka.

“I’m created by God to do the job He’s given me while I’m here.” Since God made us, our goal should be to understand and become what he has made us to be. Our objective should be to discover and to live out the job he has given us, our God-given purpose. That’s what we’ll seek to discover during the season of Lent. We’ll look

at five specific purposes God has us, but today we’re going to look at a more general one, and I believe it is the most important purpose of all.

About a year ago, Leigh and I decided we needed to change one of the rooms in our house. So we took out the furniture that was in there: a bed, a nightstand, a dresser. Leigh put some decorations on the walls, pictures of little kids playing, a metallic sign that says, “Shh!” We bought a couple of new pieces of furniture: a changing table and a crib. We stocked the room with diapers and rattles and baby clothes. We prepared a room for our impending arrival.

Why did we do that? Out of obligation? “Well, it’s gotta sleep somewhere!” Of course not! We did it out of love. We wanted our new baby to know that she was loved. She was a special creation being welcomed into our family. Even before she was born, even before we knew she was coming, we had been planning for her arrival, we had been talking about the excitement of who she would be and what her life would mean for us.

God was just as excited about the prospect of you and me being born. God tells the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.” Warren says, “You were custom-

made. There’s no one else like you. You were created as a special object of God’s love.” God made you so God could love you. That’s the first part of your purpose for being here: to receive God’s love.

God didn’t have to do this. God wasn’t lonely. God didn’t need us. But God wanted us. John tells us that God is love, and God needed a recipient of that love. So he made you. Colossians 1:16 says, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” We were created by God and for God, to be the object of God’s love.

.And because God's love lasts forever, we were made to last forever. There's more to reality than what we see around us. This life is not all that God has planned for us. Our life here is temporary, but our life with God is eternal. God has given us this life here on earth as a trust. He has entrusted us with all we have – our talents, our possessions, our resources, our time – everything we have came from God and belongs to God. He has entrusted them to us so that we could invest them in his purposes. We are most authentically ourselves, we are most alive, when we are doing what we were created to do.

What did God put you on this earth for? Not for

personal fulfillment. Not for material accumulation. You were made by God and you were made for God and you were put here for His purposes. And until you understand that, life isn't going to have much meaning.

George Herbert once said, "It's never too late to be who you might have been." It's not too late to ask the Creator why you were created. Welcome to the 40 Days of Purpose.